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Chair

The Honourable Robert Nault



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● (1820)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lab.)): Colleagues, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), we're considering the main estimates for 2018-19: votes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, and L25 under the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, vote 1 under the International Development Research Centre, and vote 1 under the International Joint Commission (Canadian Section), which were referred to the committee on Monday, April 16, 2018.

We're pleased to have with us the Minister of Global Affairs and International Development.

As I understand the process tonight, there may be a vote later on, so the objective of our exercise is to try to get a good hour in with Minister Freeland, give her a chance to make her opening comments, and then get into questions, as we always do, for an hour. That should get us to about 10 minutes away from the vote.

We'll move this thing forward as a committee and use the same process as always.

Minister, I'll turn the floor over to you to introduce your colleagues at the table and then to make your opening comments. We'll go to questions after that.

The floor is yours.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Thank you very much, Bob. I was a bit worried with all of the toing and froing with the votes, but I think we have found ourselves a one-hour window here, and that's good.

I am supported here by my outstanding colleagues from the Department of Global Affairs.

We have David Morrison, who is the associate deputy minister. I want to particularly thank David for the terrific work he's done on Venezuela. He was really leading the charge there, and he was with me in Washington on Monday. Thank you very much, David.

I think everybody knows Steve Verheul, who is our chief NAFTA negotiator and is broadly responsible for trade and trade policy.

Since we are here to talk about estimates, we have with us our finance whiz, Arun. I think Arun is going to be available later on, if there is a later on, to answer further questions.

I wanted to start, as Bob said, by making a few opening remarks.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, honourable members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, thank you for inviting me to speak to you today about the way in which our government is delivering on its foreign affairs priorities.

[English]

I would really like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the committee for your hard work. I have been travelling a great deal in recent months and have not seen you as often as I would like. This committee has played a huge role in travelling to parts of the world that are increasingly important for Canada. I would specifically like to thank and single out the committee for the work on the Magnitsky legislation. I have supported that work all along, but I think the international developments we have seen have shown how valuable it is to have that tool.

[Translation]

Our government is taking full advantage of Canada's long tradition of being present on the world stage, in order to speak with a loud voice against intolerance and nativism, while addressing the legitimate concerns of those who feel left behind by globalization. It means that we have to demonstrate constructive leadership within the international order we have established with our partners in order to promote peace, security and prosperity in the four corners of the earth.

That is exactly what our government is doing. First, I want to talk to you about our concerns about the persecution of the Rohingya populations in Rakhine State, and the forced migration of the Rohingya into Bangladesh. Canada's position is clear: no group, no people, no community should be victims of persecution or discrimination because of their identity or their religion. Canada will not sit idly by while peoples are deprived of their most basic rights because of their membership in an ethnic group. We have a moral obligation to act. That is why, on May 23, Canada announced its strategy in response to the crisis affecting the Rohingya in Myanmar and in Bangladesh.

In order to begin new initiatives and to strengthen existing ones, Canada will be providing \$300 million over three years in international assistance to meet the needs for humanitarian and development assistance, and for peace, stabilization and accountability. Canada's strengthened and integrated involvement is based on specific recommendations provided in the report by special envoy Bob Rae, to whom we owe our thanks. Mr. Rae did some excellent work in this critically important matter that marks Canada's increased contribution to the international response to the crisis.

Honourable committee members must also be aware that I went to Bangladesh at the beginning of May. I spoke at the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. Canada will continue to work closely with the international community and the United Nations in order to set the course for the future. We are assuming our share of the global responsibility to intervene in this crisis and to respond to the needs of the displaced and most vulnerable people.

● (1825)

[English]

This week, in fact on Monday, I was at the Organization of American States general assembly with David where Venezuela was a central topic. The countries in our hemisphere were clear in their overwhelming concern about the crisis. As I said directly to the Venezuelan foreign minister on Monday, the people of Venezuela have Canada's unwavering support in the face of ongoing oppression by the Maduro regime. In response to the recent illegitimate presidential election, we have downgraded our diplomatic relations with Venezuela and sanctioned a further 14 regime officials, our third round of sanctions. Canadians are committed to standing up for the human rights of Venezuelans and for democracy in Venezuela, and our government will continue to do so.

Canada also stands with the people of Ukraine. We continue to condemn Russia's illegal annexation and occupation of Crimea and its ongoing support for the war in eastern Ukraine. In April, I was very pleased to welcome foreign minister Pavlo Klimkin to the G7 foreign ministers meeting in Toronto and to my home. All G7 countries were clear and firm in their support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine.

In my last appearance before this committee, I announced the Government of Canada's support for amendments to further strengthen Bill C-47 and Canada's arms export controls. I want to thank the committee for its diligence and hard work on this important legislation. Importantly, the amendments that we will be voting on would require the government to consider the Arms Trade Treaty criteria when assessing the granting of export permits. They would also permit the Minister of Foreign Affairs to deny a permit when there is substantial risk that the export of the goods would result in the negative consequences of these criteria. These changes would mean that Global Affairs Canada would need to ensure, before authorizing the export of arms, a high level of confidence that the arms will not be used to commit human rights abuses.

As I also mentioned to this committee in February, Canada will hold itself in the future to a higher standard on the export of arms to reflect the expectations of Canadians that such exports are not used in the serious violation of human rights. Our reputation as a country with clear and cherished democratic values that stand up for human rights is strong. We must continue to be a global leader and to work to protect these values and rights.

I also want to speak briefly about the unprecedented trade action taken by the United States last week. This is not a typical trade dispute. This is the United States using national security considerations as a pretext to impose tariffs not only on Canada, but on all of its closest allies, the members of NATO and Mexico. These tariffs have been imposed on NATO allies of the United States, including

Canada, using the absurd argument that somehow the steel and aluminum that we produce poses a national security threat to the United States. This is not only ridiculous, it is also illegal under international trade law.

I was in Washington over the past two days, and while there, I spoke with senior Republican legislators who have been publicly critical of this action by the U.S. administration. Canada's response has been measured, carefully calibrated, and perfectly reciprocal. Last Thursday we announced that we will be imposing tariffs on a list of U.S. imports worth \$16.6 billion. This is Canada's strongest trade action since the Second World War.

Alongside these tariffs, Canada has initiated a case at the WTO, and we have raised a case under chapter 20 of NAFTA. As supporters of the rules-based international order, including in trade, it was very important for us to take this legal action. In taking and in crafting our responsive measures, we have been working in very close coordination with our allies in the European Union and in Mexico. We will continue to coordinate closely with them.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the countless Canadians of all political stripes who have come out in support of our strong plan to defend Canadian workers. This really is a matter of national interest and not partisan politics, as I have heard from very many Canadians who have written in directly to me, some of them, I am afraid, beginning their emails by saying they do not vote for the Liberal Party. In particular, I was pleased to see Jason Kenney, Brad Wall, Rona Ambrose, James Moore, the Canadian Labour Congress, United Steelworkers, and Unifor voice their support for the strong Canadian response.

The Prime Minister and I were also glad to speak to Canada's premiers on Monday. I'm grateful for their support. I was able to brief Premier Moe of Saskatchewan personally ahead of his trip to Washington, where he is even as we speak. I would like to thank him for being there and advocating for Canada.

On a final note, Mr. Chair, let me conclude with a few words about one of Canada's signature priorities, which you may have heard of, that is happening this week. That is our G7 presidency and the leaders summit. This week and this year is a real opportunity for our country to speak with a strong voice on the international stage.

● (1830)

[Translation]

Canada will call on our counterparts in addressing the global issues that demand urgent attention. This specifically means investing in economic growth, which benefits everyone, to get ready for the jobs of the future, to work together on climate change, the oceans and clean energy, and to build a more peaceful and safe world. Above all, we will promote gender equality and enhance the power of women.

I will close by stating that, in the G7 and in the international community, Canada will continue to come to the defence of a rules-based international order and to find ways to strengthen it. We do so each time we have the opportunity, and we pay specific attention to the link between peace, common prosperity, open trade, and human rights.

[English]

Thank you very much, Bob. Thank you very much, colleagues. I am happy to take your questions now.

The Chair: Thank you for those opening comments.

Colleagues, as normal, we'll get right into it, and we'll start with Mr. Allison, please.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

To our witnesses, thank you. Mr. Verheul and Minister, thank you for your hard work on this file. I know you've spent many nights and weekends working on it, and you're probably wondering where your home is now, whether it's Ottawa or Washington, so thank you for that.

Last Thursday, Canadian steel producers stopped shipping orders to the United States. I had a chance to meet with the Canadian Steel Producers Association on Monday, as I'm sure you did, Minister, or certainly your boss did. I know the Prime Minister had a meeting with them.

They've indicated to us that unless this is resolved—and I know it's very complicated, and it's not going to be resolved overnight—they will probably be reducing production and laying people off if a deal is not done. I get the fact that this is probably going to take some time.

My question would be, with respect to table 1, why did we not immediately impose tariffs on the steel? I realize in table 2, there are going to be some things we want to discuss. Given the fact we knew this was may be coming, I'm wondering why we didn't do some of that consultation ahead of time. More importantly, why are we not issuing tariffs on steel and aluminum immediately?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you very much for your engagement with our steel and aluminum workers. Really, I think that extends to the whole committee and all parties around this table. It's very important for our workers and our industries to feel the strong support of the government and of all Canadians.

Part of your question spoke to readiness and preparation. I want to assure all Canadians very much, including the industry, that Canada was absolutely ready for this action. This is not a U.S. action that we desired. We think it is a very grave mistake, but we were absolutely prepared, and that preparation is manifest in the extensiveness of the list that we published on Thursday.

In terms of the timing, a few considerations played a part in that timing. One is, as I mentioned, a strong view that we are strongest when we work together. The European Union's actions will take effect on July 1, as will ours, and we think international coordination is very useful in this matter.

You referred also to the value of consultations. We share that view. A public consultation period is particularly valuable in terms of giving all of our stakeholders in Canada an opportunity to be in touch with us about the list. Let me say, as a bit of a footnote here, I've heard from a lot of MPs directly about concerns in their constituencies, and I'd like to encourage everyone to send me an email personally. I'll be very happy to receive it.

● (1835)

Having that public period is useful. It's also useful because publishing the list gives the affected American companies and stakeholders and workers an opportunity to see it and to respond.

You're quite right also in the thought behind the question that surely there was an opportunity to consult with stakeholders beforehand. There was, and very many extensive conversations were held, particularly with the steel and aluminum industry prior to Thursday—and I want to thank Steve and his team for leading that. Having said that, public consultation and the publishing of the list has a very different impact, and it's valuable to have that consultation period.

Mr. Dean Allison: I think that we should have gone immediately to the tariffs. I realize table 2 may need some consultation, but we'll disagree on that one.

I'm going to turn it over to Ziad for another question.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Minister, you're very busy. You have a busy schedule, and we appreciate that you are able to spend an hour with the committee.

You mentioned the Magnitsky law. It's a very, very powerful tool in the hands of our government and any government to put sanctions on regimes and officials who work against humanity in general, and anything that matters to human rights. We've been hearing the Iranian supreme leader, Khamenei, and even his officials speak about genocide. Could you please explain why this tool hasn't been used against Iran or any Iranian officials yet?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you for the question.

Let me start by sharing the view that you've just expressed, that the threats that were recently expressed by the supreme leader Khamenei are absolutely abhorrent. We are appalled by them in Canada, and I am appalled by them personally. We're very public in our denunciation of those remarks. We need to be very clear that Canada is a steadfast friend of Israel, and we absolutely support Israel's right to live in peace.

I also want to say, with respect to Iran—and this is a matter of great personal importance to me—that at this moment, any contact that Canada has with Iran has to be focused on the terrible plight of Maryam Mombeini. She is a widow. She is a Canadian citizen. Her sons are in Canada. She has not only had to live through the terrible and tragic death of her husband, but she is now barred from leaving Iran. I have spoken with Mrs. Mombeini on several occasions. I've told her of Canada's strong support. Last week I also spoke directly with Iran's foreign minister and I was very clear with him that the priority in Canada's conversations with Iran is that Maryam Mombeini must be able to return home.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Where is the wisdom in this whole game here? They're going to continue doing what they're doing, and we're not really raising the bar enough to be able to show them that we are able to use.... We have a wonderful tool in our hands and I think the time has come, beyond diplomacy, to use this against this regime and to show them that we're willing to take an action.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Let me just say—and I hope you won't mind if I quibble about words; I'm a former journalist—I would never call our relationship with a country like Iran a game, particularly since Canadians, like Mrs. Mombeini, are trapped in that. Canada has a very strong position when it comes to Iran. We are very forceful in our relationship and in the limits we place on that relationship, and that's the right thing to do.

• (1840)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Thanks, Ziad.

We'll go to Mr. Saini, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Good evening, Madam Minister.

Recently there have been a number of examples when the rules-based international order has been sorely tested, specifically by authoritarianism, grave human rights violations, humanitarian crises, and contempt for international law and standards.

Canada is an ardent supporter of the rules-based international order that it helped to build. With the presidency of the G7 for 2018, how is Canada working with our partners and allies so that the order is maintained and upheld?

[English]

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Okay.

[Translation]

Thank you for the question, Mr. Saini.

As an anglophone who is also trying to improve her French, I would like to start by congratulating you on your French.

Mr. Raj Saini: Thank you.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I hope that you agree, Ms. Laverdière. I think you are the only francophone here, but perhaps someone else is as well.

Mr. Saini, I quite agree with you. For Canada, the rules-based international order is a very important principle; it is so more than ever today. For our country, the G7 summit is a wonderful opportunity to work with our allies in support of the rules-based international order, and also to talk about the matter with Canadians.

For us as parliamentarians, the reason for that need is very clear, but for Canadians, the matter has no real impact on their daily lives. The summit really is an opportunity for us to stress the importance of the international institutions for all Canadians and for the entire world.

I will go back to the first question. Illegal tariffs on steel and aluminum are another example of the importance of a rules-based international order and of the importance of organizations like the World Trade Organization, the WTO, that Canada supports.

Thank you.

Mr. Raj Saini: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Levitt, please.

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Minister, I want to address an issue that has been a focus of our work on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, and something that our government and you have been at the forefront of, and that is calling for the protection of the Rohingya and an end to their persecution. You have said on many occasions that this is ethnic cleansing and that the perpetrators responsible must be brought to justice. Most recently, you visited Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh with special envoy Bob Rae to see the situation firsthand. In addition, last month our government made an important announcement to help the affected populations in the region.

Can you update this committee on how Canada is continuing to help the Rohingya and what actions our government is taking?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Particularly when I am outside Canada or talking with colleagues from other countries about the Rohingya issue, it makes me really proud to be Canadian because, if anything, our government has support for a strong position on the Rohingya from the opposition parties on both the left and the right, and if anything I feel from the opposition parties the idea that Canada should be doing even more.

As Canada's foreign affairs minister, that's a great position to be in. I think we may be the only country in the world, certainly the only non-Muslim majority country in the world, where there is such a strong and united national sense that these people, among the most wretched in the world, deserve our country's strong support.

I'm sure that the other members of Parliament who are gathered around this table have all experienced what I have, which is strong support in my own constituency. People come up to me on the street and thank me for the strong position Canada is taking on this issue.

If Canadians are listening to the proceedings of this committee—I don't know how many are, Chair, but maybe a few—I would like to say thank you, and thank you, Canada. I think it shows one of the great qualities of our country.

Michael, I've spoken already a little about the announcement that we made about 10 days ago, of Canada's stepped-up action in support of the Rohingya, the \$300 million over three years. Maybe I can speak a little about our effort to ensure accountability for those who are responsible for—I agree with you, Michael—crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing.

I spoke this morning on the Rohingya issue with one of my new friends on the international scene, Minister Ali, the foreign minister of Bangladesh. We are developing a very strong partnership with Bangladesh. Minister Ali and the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, will be coming to Canada for the outreach session of the G7 summit. We agreed that we would spend some time talking about the Rohingya issue.

Canada is leading the creation of a contact group of countries. The permanent representatives to the UN will be meeting in New York this week to get some collective action on the Rohingya.

I would also like to thank Japan and my colleague, foreign minister Taro Kono. As the sole Asian country that is a member of the G7, I think it is able to play and is playing a particularly useful role in this issue. I've spoken about it often with Minister Kono. I spoke with him on Tuesday about the Rohingya issue and ways in which Japan is working directly in conversation with Myanmar to try to push the issue from that direction.

On the accountability front, people here are aware that we have sanctioned the general who we believe is directly responsible for these atrocious acts. I think it's also worth pointing out—and this is something that was particularly appalling to me and I think may not be widely appreciated—when I was in Cox's Bazar a month ago, I met with Rohingya refugees who had arrived there just a week earlier. This atrocity is ongoing. Rohingya are continuing to flee across the border to Bangladesh, and a person has to be in a truly dreadful situation to choose this very difficult thing of becoming a refugee, of walking to what is certainly the people of—

• (1845)

The Chair: Minister, I'll have to leave it there.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I have to stop now? Okay. I'm sorry. I care a lot about the Rohingya, Bob.

The Chair: I know.

We'll go to Madame Laverdière, *s'il vous plaît*.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for joining us this evening, Madam Minister.

I would like to start by emphasizing that I agree with you completely that, particularly given the decisions of the Trump administration, coordination and cooperation with our other allies is absolutely essential.

Thank you also for your offer to us to email you. I am going to take advantage of that to perhaps talk about a number of topics, especially as there has been a problem with the many letters I have written to you that have not been answered. There are still others waiting, but I really look forward to reading your reply to my letters.

Very briefly, here is my third point on the Rohingya issue. In fact, we share your concern: we have to face many challenges. Another challenge is the situation in Yemen, which is absolutely tragic. There again, assistance and accountability are needed. It is absolutely essential.

However, I would like to go back to the matter of Bill C-47, about the implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty, the ATT. Some small improvements have clearly been made and I am pleased to see that at least. However, there are certainly gaping holes in the bill, including the issue of selling arms to the United States. I know that 33,000 Canadians have written to you on the issue, asking you to seal those holes.

So I was wondering if you have been informed about the fact that 33,000 Canadians have written to you about the issue in the last 10 days or two weeks

• (1850)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Okay, thank you for the question.

You have touched on a lot of issues and I am going to make some quick comments before I talk about Bill C-47.

First of all, I would like to thank you and the NDP for your support for the strong actions that Canada took last week. This morning, I talked to Jagmeet Singh and thanked him directly. This is really a national issue and I am very pleased that we have a position that one might compare to a Team Canada.

When I was in Washington yesterday and Monday, people told me that they were astonished to see that we can deal with issues in a nonpartisan fashion. I agree with you that the Rohingya situation, is really important, and, as I have already said, it is an issue where I feel that Canada can make a difference.

Thank you for bringing up the issue of Yemen. It is also a very grave humanitarian crisis, and Canada is actively involved in the matter.

You mentioned Bill C-47 and I also want to thank the committee for its work on that bill. As you know, our government made the decision to improve the act. Perhaps we have not done all the things that our critics would like us to have done, but we have made some very serious changes and I feel that they have improved the act. This is a demonstration of the importance of committee work.

You specifically brought up the matter of trade with the Americans not needing a permit. As you said, our commercial and security ties with the United States are special. Canada and the United States are partners in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, and in the North American Aerospace Defence Command, or NORAD. We also have an industrial base and a defence base that are integrated. At this moment, it is more important than ever to focus on that reality.

The ATT does not exclude an accelerated procedure for assessing and authorizing exports to certain countries. For example, controlled items circulate freely among the countries of the Benelux union.

I also want to emphasize something that is very important for me. The changes we made in Bill C-47 have strengthened the act for various reasons. We have written the ATT criteria directly into the Canadian legislation. We have included a legal obligation for the government to be able to use export permits for arms that would violate those criteria. These are serious changes and I am proud of them.

• (1855)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: However, despite those changes, we have seen that, as recently as last week, the Control Arms Coalition, which is very well known, has expressed serious concerns about the approach Canada is taking in implementing the Arms Trade Treaty, and has expressed the hope that the situation will be re-established.

That leads me to another point. Can I ask for your help, Madam Minister

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: We will see.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: During the debate on Bill C-47 in the House, a number of Liberal members gave the impression that Amnesty International and the Control Arms Coalition were now supporting Bill C-47 and mentioned that Amnesty International for one appreciated the little changes that have been made.

I know that our partners, groups like Amnesty international, the Control Arms Coalition, Project Ploughshares and the Rideau Institute, continue to be opposed to the bill and that a number of those organizations are very frustrated to see that their opinion is being incorrectly represented by Liberal members in the House.

So could I ask you to please pass the message to your colleagues, that those organizations remain opposed to Bill C-47, and that they will not support it?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Laverdière.

[English]

We're going to go to Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, please.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Minister, following up on Raj's question about threats to our international rules-based order, last week during the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Warsaw, Poland, Secretary General Stoltenberg lauded Canada for our very significant contributions to NATO security on its military front line in eastern Europe, in Estonia and Romania, and particularly he noted in Ukraine. He expressed the view that Canada's Unifier mission was integral to NATO's overall security structure.

As you stated in your opening statement, Canada's an unwavering friend and ally of Ukraine. However, the territorial sovereignty and integrity of Ukraine continues to be threatened on a daily basis by widespread shelling in the Donbass, and the territorial integrity is assailed by the continuing illegal military occupation of Crimea.

Can you update our committee on how Canada stands in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and Ukraine's territorial integrity in response to Russia's lethal aggressions?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you very much, Borys, for that question. I would like to take this opportunity to really thank you for your commitment over many, many years to the Ukraine issue. Something that perhaps not everyone is familiar with is the fact that you have been speaking up for the Crimean Tatars for many, many years. This is a group of people who have experienced severe repression for a very long time. They are among the chief victims of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. I'm grateful to you for your support for them. I think it is really important that Canada stands up for them, as we do.

I'm also glad you mentioned Jens Stoltenberg's comments. I do think he is a person with whom Canada has a very close connection. In fact, I think he was one of the first people who called to congratulate me when I became foreign minister of Canada. We have a very close conversation with him.

I think it's useful to use this moment at committee to be sure that Canadians appreciate just how much Canada is contributing today to NATO and to the support of our friends and allies in Europe.

Canada is, as you mentioned, Borys, one of the four lead countries of the enhanced forward presence mission in Poland and the Baltic States. We are the lead country in Latvia. That is something that's appreciated not only by Latvia but across the region. Last week the Prime Minister of Estonia was here, and he made that point explicitly to me. He said that Canadian women and men are in Latvia but that supports all of us; we really, really appreciate it.

Canada is present in Romania, and the Unifier mission in Ukraine is a very important symbol of Canada's support for Ukraine. It also has tremendous practical value in training the Ukrainian men and women in uniform. I think there could be no better confirmation of the value of our work there than the fact that Sweden has now chosen to join us and will be sending Swedish troops to join the Canadians in that training mission. That is a really good sign that what we're doing really helps.

I mentioned in my remarks the significance of inviting foreign minister Pavlo Klimkin to be a guest and to speak directly with the G7 foreign ministers. We began the G7 foreign ministers meeting with a breakfast in my house. It was ministers only. After a beginning conversation among the ministers, Pavlo joined us and was able to speak very directly to the G7 foreign ministers about the situation in Ukraine. I heard from many of my G7 colleagues how much they valued being able to have such a direct conversation with Minister Klimkin. It was really a moment when we heard very strong support from the G7 for Ukraine. That was reflected in the statement by the G7 foreign ministers. I know that this is an issue that will be raised at the leaders summit.

I met with Secretary Mike Pompeo in Washington on Monday. We also discussed the issue of Ukraine and ways that Canada and the United States can work together on it.

• (1900)

The Chair: We'll go to Madam Vandenbeld, please.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you, Minister, for being here.

Thank you for mentioning in your opening remarks the escalating humanitarian and political crisis in Venezuela. We know that the Maduro regime is increasing its human rights abuses, dismantling democratic institutions, attacking opposition members and parties, undermining the Parliament, stacking the courts, and attacking civil society.

On May 20 you yourself, as well as many members of the Lima Group, said that the elections there were completely fraudulent. You have downgraded our diplomatic relationship. Last week Irwin Cotler was here, and he provided the report from the panel of international experts that was created under the OAS secretary general. It found reasonable grounds that crimes against humanity have occurred—extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions, torture, rape, and other forms of sexual violence.

I know that you have just returned from the OAS and that you are taking a leading role in this. I'm wondering if you could please update the committee on what measures Canada is and will be taking.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you very much, Anita, for your work on the committee. Like Borys, you're a person who has been committed to these issues for many years. I'm really grateful for that and I appreciate your expertise.

You're right that the situation in Venezuela has been a particular focus for the government. Again, I'd like to take this opportunity to share with members of the committee, but also with Canadians more generally, the extent to which Canadian leadership on this issue is very much appreciated throughout our hemisphere. There are only two G7 countries in our hemisphere. Canada is one of them. The fact that Canada is devoting so much focused attention to the situation in Venezuela, and the fact that Canada is such an energetic member of the Lima group means a great deal to Venezuelans who are suffering a loss of their democratic and human rights. I think it also is very heartening to our other friends and allies in the hemisphere, who see that Canada is not only with them in principle, but that we are really prepared to devote the sweat equity to act on the principles that bring together the members of the Organization of American States.

Our meeting of the OAS on Monday.... As I said, David was there with me. We're lucky to have him in the department because of his deep expertise in Latin America. I've heard a lot of people praising you for that, David, so thank you very much.

It was an important meeting. It was an opportunity for the members of the Lima group to speak directly to the Venezuelan government, to the Venezuelan foreign minister, and to make clear our absolute commitment to democracy for the people of Venezuela.

I think that having that sort of a direct exchange has a real impact. Again, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank, in particular, our Caribbean friends, for whom this can be a particularly difficult issue. They are joining us. We share democratic values with many of our long-time Canadian friends in the Caribbean, and I would really like to thank those who are joining us in the work of the Lima group. That's particularly important. This again—

• (1905)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I'm going to have to stop talking. I'm sorry.

The Chair: I'm going to have to cut you off. I hate to do that.

We'll go to Mr. Sidhu, please.

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for taking the time out of your busy schedule.

I'll touch upon Russia. We have several concrete examples of Russia's continued flouting of international norms and standards, especially its involvement in the recent nerve agent attack in the United Kingdom, and its support for murderers, the Assad regime in Syria.

As a strong defender of the rules-based international order, Canada had decided to make Russia the key element of the G7 presidency. I was wondering what Canada has done so far to deter Russia. What are your allies at the G7 countries going to do or expect, to take action against Russia?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you very much for the question, Jati.

Actually, this gives me an opportunity to acknowledge another official, Mark Gwozdecky. He is the director of policy in the department. As I was walking in here, I was asking Mark how we are doing on some of the issues in the communiqué.

Indeed, this has been a focus of Canadian foreign policy for some time and a major theme in our G7 year. As you mentioned, the G7 foreign ministers met shortly after the Salisbury attack, which was yet another gross violation of international norms by Russia. In fact, the G7 was able to act before the foreign ministers' meeting with a strong G7 statement in solidarity with our British partners and allies, condemning this attack.

I know that was very much appreciated by the United Kingdom, and I think a very powerful message was sent following the Salisbury attack by the very strong action by the international community, including Canada, in expelling Russian diplomats in response. I think that demonstration of international unity was very powerful and was an example of Canada using our G7 presidency this year to really play a leadership role in bringing together that coalition and in supporting democracy and the sovereignty of our allies.

I think this committee for its work on the Magnitsky legislation, which I mentioned earlier. That, of course, has been an important additional tool, which we have in our diplomatic tool box and have been able to use with regard to our policy towards Russia.

Canada has been very closely engaged and supportive of our partners, the Netherlands and Australia, in the recent report about the MH17 tragedy, another important example. As we have discussed with regard to the Rohingya, this is an example of the importance of the rules-based order, the importance of gathering evidence, and the importance and value of establishing accountability. It is an issue that Canada is following very closely and will continue to follow closely. I think it is an important issue, which is emerging during this, our G7 presidency year.

I'd just like to make a final point, which was certainly an element of the G7 foreign ministers meeting and I expect will be an important issue when the G7 leaders meet very soon, and that is the importance of standing up for and defending our democracies against foreign interference. Something that we are encountering, particularly from Russia, is a very orchestrated attempt to undermine our democratic institutions from the inside and to undermine the credibility and effectiveness of how our democracies work. It's very important for us as Canadians to be aware of this issue and to work hard to stand up for our democracies. I intentionally say "us as Canadians", not just as parliamentarians.

It's an issue that I discussed with the Prime Minister of Estonia last week, and he brought with him his official who is specifically in charge of countering cyber-threats from Russia. This official said that it may be easier in Estonia than in other countries because their public is very prepared for this and has the natural defences. I think that is a lesson that all of the democracies can and must learn from countries like our partners in the Baltic States and from countries like Ukraine. This is a threat that may have begun in the Baltic States and in Ukraine, but it is very much an issue for us here in Canada.

● (1910)

I think it's an important issue for the world's leading industrial democracies—that's what the G7 is—to be addressing. We are seeing that action, and Canada is very much playing a leading role there.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now we'll go to Mr. Genuis, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Minister.

I think in the opposition we agree with many of the words you've said. It's our job to challenge you, so we think there is some dissonance between the words and the actions.

I want to start by asking you a question about Ukraine.

The *National Post* obtained figures from your department which show that spending on election monitoring was over \$8 million in the 2014-15 year. It's now under \$700,000. As you know, Ukraine has elections next year. Why were there cuts to election monitoring?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I'm delighted you asked that question, because the cuts to funding for election monitoring were actually cuts made by the Conservative government of Stephen Harper.

I want to assure members of this committee and all Canadians that our government is absolutely committed to restoring the funding for election monitoring. Ukraine—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: But, Minister, I'm sorry to just jump in—

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Hang on, hang on, hang on—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: —but in terms of what you said about Stephen Harper—

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: —I didn't cut you off, Garnett. Hang on, hang on—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, I do—

Hon. Christine Freeland: No, no, no, I'm not—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: —control the time.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I haven't finished my answer.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I control the time.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: No, I have not finished my answer.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can I just clarify the question?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: No, no, no, I'm—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It was \$8 million in 2014-15—

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: No, no, I'm going to finish my answer, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: —and \$700,000 this year—

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I'm sorry, I'm sorry—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: —so you can't blame Stephen Harper—

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: No, no, I—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: —when there was over \$8 million in 2014-15.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, please.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry, I think the mike has to be cut off, please.

The Chair: Yes, that's a good idea, and I have control of the mike.

We should shut this mike off, please.

There you go.

Minister, finish your comments, and then, Mr. Genuis, you get to ask another question or make a comment. Let's do this like adults. That would be useful.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That is not how the process works.

The Chair: Yes, it is how the process works.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: No, it's not.

The Chair: Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you.

I'm happy to take your questions, but I'd ask you to behave as the other members of the committee do and listen to the answer.

I am glad to take this opportunity here to make an absolute commitment to all Canadians and to the people of Ukraine that Canada will be energetically engaged in election monitoring in Ukraine next year. The elections in Ukraine next year are an absolutely critical moment, and we will be there.

● (1915)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think members know that the way this committee typically proceeds is the member posing the questions directs the time of the questions. It seems the chair wants to proceed in a different fashion today. Let me move on to some other questions.

First of all, with regard to that other question, the figures I quoted were clear, and the public record is clear in terms of what was spent in the 2014-15 period and what is being spent now.

Minister, during a recent meeting of the committee, we were told by officials the government does not fund organizations that are engaged in illegal activity abroad, that is, activity that is illegal in the country where it is taking place. Is it correct that the government does not fund activity that is illegal in the country where it's taking place?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: To the best of my knowledge, it is.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, the budget gave \$5 million to Marie Stopes International. Is the government confident that Marie Stopes International does not break the law in countries where it operates?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Let me be very clear on the direction of that question.

We have a feminist Prime Minister. I'm a feminist, and I'm proud that we have a feminist foreign policy. I believe it is an absolute right of women to control their bodies. I believe that sexual and reproductive health for women is their right. I believe that is a right for Canadian women, and I am proud to stand up for women around the world to have that right.

We, sadly, are living in a time when the sexual and reproductive rights of women in some countries in the world are being limited. That is wrong. As you know, Canada has stepped up its support for sexual and reproductive health for women in part to fill that void. That is something our government is extremely proud to do. If the Conservative Party believes that a woman should not have control of her own body, whether she is Canadian or a citizen of any other country, I would be quite delighted to take that position to the voters of Canada.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, I will just clarify the question.

I think Canadians just have a right to know one way or the other about the policy of the government with respect to funding activity that's illegal in other countries. You said in the previous question that, to your knowledge, Canada is not funding activity that's illegal in the country in which it takes place. Of course I note your government advocates for changes to the law, and that's normal. Obviously, Canada would advocate for changes to the law in cases where it doesn't agree, but are you confident that Marie Stopes International, receiving \$5 million of Canadian money, does not break the law in countries where they operate? Are you confident of that?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I again want to address the underlying point which is being insinuated and pushed there, and I would like Canadians to be very aware of the tendency of that question. Again, if the Conservative Party of Canada wants to stand up for Canadian voters and say that it is a party which is opposed to a woman's right to choose in Canada, that it is a party which is opposed to support for sexual and reproductive health of women around the world, I would be delighted to take that issue to the ballot box.

I also want to say in this year, the year of #MeToo, the year when the people of Ireland—the women of Ireland, but the people of Ireland—have spoken up in a free and open ballot for a woman's right to choose, I am extremely proud to be very, very clear about our government's support for choice. Again, I would be delighted to have the Conservative Party, rather than make insinuations if you are opposed to abortion, if you want to limit a woman's right to choose in Canada or around the world, please come out and say it clearly.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have one final question, Minister, about the issue of foreign interference in elections.

Again, I think the public record will show the answer that was given and the question that was asked.

With respect to Bill C-76, this is the bill the government has put forward that references the issue of foreign interference in elections. I know that this is something you're concerned about and that you've personally been a victim of to some extent.

The law allows a foreign entity to transfer money to a Canadian organization outside of the writ period, and the Canadian organization, as long as that foreign money is mingled with its own money, can then use that money in the process of the election because it has now become part of their organization. Theoretically, the Russian government could give a Canadian organization millions of dollars and, as long as it was mingled with Canadian money outside of an election, that could be used during an election. That's the present reality under Bill C-76.

Given the concerns you've raised, do you think Bill C-76 as presently written has sufficient tools to address the possibility of foreign interference in Canadian elections?

• (1920)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Let me say first of all I do think that as members of this committee, while we may disagree about issues like a woman's right to choose, we all do strongly agree on the importance of defending and standing up for Canadian democracy, and I would like to commend my colleague Karina Gould for the great work she has been doing in that space. I really believe this is important to get the legislation right. It's also absolutely important to have the right public conversation about this.

As I said in my earlier answer in referring to the conversation with the Estonian prime minister, a lot of this is about Canada having the right laws. A lot of this is about Canada having the tools to detect and fight back against cyber-interference, and that's an area that Minister Goodale is working at very effectively.

A big part of this, as well, is public consciousness and public awareness. This is an area where I think we, as members of Parliament, all have a shared responsibility to have a conversation with Canadians, to have a conversation with our constituents, and to be sure that we are all prepared to push back against that interference.

I want to say one last thing. I had the privilege of being with the Prime Minister at the bilateral meeting today with Emmanuel Macron. I think the French election was an example of a very enlightened public and a very enlightened and responsible media pushing back against foreign interference. I'd like to congratulate the people of France. We can learn a lot from them.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Genuis and Minister.

The last question goes to Mr. Saini. That will complete the two rounds and our discussion with the minister.

Mr. Saini.

[Translation]

Mr. Raj Saini: Since our government came to power, we have adopted a feminist foreign policy. Can you explain to the committee why that is so important and how that feminist foreign policy manifests itself in your priorities?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you for asking me another question in French.

I have already talked about feminism and about the importance of having a feminist international policy.

Our government's policy on the issue is based on a number of factors. One of them is Canada's feminist international assistance policy, that my colleague Ms. Bibeau is promoting. This major strategy has already changed the lives of women and girls around the world. Internationally, there is a lot of interest in that strategy. A number of countries are closely following what Canada is doing in this area and they are very interested.

We also have initiatives dealing with women, peace and security, such as the Elsie initiative on women in peace operations. Canada is actively working to ensure that there will be more women in United Nations peace operations. Canada is working with a number of international partners on that structural change, and I see the start of a change here.

The G7 summit will be another opportunity for Canada to raise questions about women and gender equality. The meeting of the gender equality advisory council will provide a very significant opportunity in this regard.

As I announced during the G7 Foreign and Security Ministers' meeting, Cecilia Malmström and I have decided to call a meeting in September to bring together all the women foreign affairs ministers in the world. The meeting is raising a lot of interest. In fact, during the G7 Foreign and Security Ministers' meeting, we had dinner with a small group of foreign affairs ministers who are women. I invited the other G7 foreign affairs ministers, including Federica Mogherini, a woman, of course, and she joined us.

Taro Kono, Japan's Foreign Affairs Minister, decided to join us. He found the meeting so interesting that, on Tuesday, he asked me if he could attend the meeting of women foreign affairs ministers. I said yes of course, and that I was going to invite all the women foreign affairs ministers in the world, plus the G7 ministers, whether they are women or not. This is a very important feature of our foreign policy.

Let me give you another example. Mr. Morrison was with me in Washington at the meeting of the Organization of American States, the OAS. One of the participants was Costa Rica's new Minister of Foreign Affairs. She is the country's first female Minister of Foreign Affairs. She explained to us that the government of Costa Rica had decided to have a cabinet based on gender equality. During the meeting, she told me that she had been inspired by our prime minister's 2015 decision to do the same thing.

• (1925)

So we need to understand that an example from Canada can have an effect on the entire world.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

That wraps up our two rounds, and I think we've exhausted our time with the minister. I want to take this opportunity to thank the minister for answering our questions. I'm looking forward to seeing her again in the committee in the very near future.

Colleagues, we're going to suspend for five minutes. There are going to be bells in about 10 or 15 minutes. It will be a half-hour bell. We have a good 30 or 40 minutes for officials.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Don't make us miss the vote, Bob. We'll all be in trouble with our whips.

The Chair: We're watching it right here on live TV. We're all good.

We'll suspend for five and then we'll go to the officials and ask some questions, as is the normal process.

Thank you very much.

• (1925)

(Pause)

• (1930)

The Chair: Colleagues, this meeting is now back in session.

In front of us we have officials from Global Affairs. Maybe what we could do is have Heather start and introduce yourselves with your titles for the record.

Then, as it works here now, we'll go straight to questions.

Colleagues, let's try to keep our questions and our answers succinct, and we'll move along at a fairly good pace.

I'll turn the floor over to Mr. Genuis to start it off, but before that, we'll start with Heather.

Ms. Heather Jeffrey (Assistant Deputy Minister, Consular, Emergency Management and Security, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): My name is Heather Jeffrey. I'm the assistant deputy minister for consular, security and emergency management.

Mr. Mark Gwozdecky (Assistant Deputy Minister, International Security and Political Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): My name is Mark Gwozdecky. I'm the assistant deputy minister for international security and political affairs, and I also carry the title of political director.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Benjamin (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Americas, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Good evening. My name is Martin Benjamin. I am the Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Americas.

• (1935)

[English]

Mr. Arun Thangaraj (Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Planning, Finance and Information Technology, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I am Arun Thangaraj, the assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the officials for being here. I have a few questions, some new and some in follow-up to what was discussed earlier.

I want to ask about this issue of Air Canada changing their designation from Taiwan to Taiwan, China. I'd like to know if Air Canada at any time sought the government's advice or support in its dealings with the Chinese government, and if so, what the response from the Government of Canada was.

Mr. Martin Benjamin: Mr. Chair, if you don't mind, we have our colleague here who covers Asia.

The Chair: That's fine. Ms. Taylor is going to answer the question.

Ms. Sarah Taylor (Director General, North Asia and Oceania, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I'm Sarah Taylor, director general for north Asia and Oceania.

To my knowledge, Air Canada did not seek our advice before making that decision.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, thank you very much.

On the issue of the Rohingya, there was some discussion but I have to say I don't share the general good feeling about what we've been able to do on the Rohingya. I appreciate that there are members of multiple parties concerned about this and there has been a lot of discussion about it here, but we have an unfolding genocide that we haven't been able to stop or hold people accountable for. We have the application of similar techniques in the abuse of other minorities in Burma—the Chin, the Kachin, and others—and the Burmese military and government continue to act with relative impunity.

I would like to understand why only one person has been sanctioned. The House of Commons unanimously agreed to a motion calling for new sanctions against responsible actors. The minister mentioned one person being sanctioned, the person she perceived as most directly responsible, but the commander-in-chief of the armed forces hasn't even been sanctioned. I wonder if the officials can share with us why there has not been a stronger response in terms of sanctioning those responsible?

Ms. Sarah Taylor: As the minister mentioned, we have indeed put in place a number of measures to address the Rohingya crisis. That's an ongoing and evolving file which we're continuing to follow and address. We're continuing to advocate for perpetrators of gross human rights violations and abuses to be held to account. We're working closely with other countries and international organizations and civil society to find the right pathway to establish accountability for the atrocities committed, and we're also trying to work on ways to achieve justice and lasting peace in Myanmar.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I understand that, but at a basic level, isn't it fairly clear that the commander-in-chief of the armed forces is responsible for a genocide being perpetrated by the armed forces that he controls?

Ms. Sarah Taylor: Sorry, I couldn't hear the full question.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm trying to understand why we've been so absent when it comes to sanctions against the Burmese government or military with respect to the Rohingya crisis. I just asked if it isn't fairly easy to draw the conclusion that Min Aung Hlaing, the commander-in-chief of the Burmese armed forces, who commands the army that is committing a genocide, is responsible to some degree.

Ms. Sarah Taylor: As I said, there are a number of other organizations involved in this, and so we are in ongoing discussions with international organizations and other countries about accountability and how best to address accountability. I would mention also that Canada actually does already have in place a sanctions regime against the Government of Myanmar. There are a number of existing

sanctions that are in place that reflect some of our previous and ongoing concerns about democracy and the rule of law in Myanmar.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, I think members are aware there are existing sanctions. There was a unanimous motion in the House of Commons calling for the imposition of tough new sanctions. I understand discussions are ongoing. It's just that if we're going to have an effective international regime to combat genocide and crimes against humanity, we have to be able to react in real time.

Just as an observation, I've only been a member of Parliament for two and half years, and we've dealt with two major instances of genocide, one in Burma and one in Daesh-controlled areas of Syria and Iraq, and the international community and Canada haven't even been able to clarify that genocide is happening in those cases. It's a source of ongoing frustration for me as an MP who is concerned about these issues.

Jumping around a bit, could we please hear about the situation in Nicaragua and what Canada's response has been to that?

• (1940)

Mr. Martin Benjamin: That's a very good question. Our government is quite concerned about the situation in Nicaragua.

We are actually working with both parties and we want to see a dialogue between the opposition and some of those groups in the government. There are many roads being blocked right now throughout the country and that situation worries us. There have been manifestations and there were a few people killed. This is a situation that is evolving. I think all the parties are asking for a robust dialogue between both parties, which we are actually sponsoring.

There were discussions at the OAS in the last two days. All member states of the hemisphere are concerned about the situation and we're watching with close attention. There is an ongoing dialogue right now that we're hoping will resolve those issues.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Saini, go ahead, please.

Mr. Raj Saini: Good evening. Thank you very much for coming.

I have a general question to ask of you and it's basically on your departmental plan for 2018-19.

I'm reminded that today is D-Day. After the Second World War, as you are aware, Bretton Woods happened and the liberal international order was set up to prevent further war but also to provide economic growth across the world in a rules-based system. As you know, that growth has not been even in different parts of the world. If you look at sub-Saharan Africa, 50% of the world's poorest live there. One of your core priorities, priority number one in your departmental plan, states that one of the objectives is to strengthen the rules-based international order.

How do you propose the department will do that?

Mr. Mark Gwozdecky: That's a very big question. As the minister mentioned earlier, it was and continues to be a subject of discussion including in the G7, where G7 foreign ministers took a very clear decision that we would stand up collectively for that international rules-based order and that we would confront the threats to our democracies and these systems, both those threats that come externally and those that we need to do domestically in terms of demonstrating to the people of our countries that our democracies are working for them and delivering for them.

We also face external threats and we have committed and recommitted ourselves to bolstering the institutions that underpin that rules-based order. We've also committed to calling out activities of hostile actors when they act against us. That's one of the reasons the G7 foreign ministers agreed to establish a mechanism whereby we would be working collectively together to identify threats and examples of foreign interference, and would work to coordinate our responses to those.

Mr. Raj Saini: The second question I have is also about your departmental plan. I recently came back from Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, and I had the great opportunity to go to China, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and Indonesia in the fall. One of the things I noticed in that region of the world, especially in Southeast Asia, is the fact that right now trade groups are forming. You have ASEAN. Then you have ASEAN plus three. Then you have ASEAN plus six. Now you have RCEP currently being negotiated.

I know that we as a country have started preliminary talks with ASEAN, but it seems to me that ASEAN right now is focused on RCEP and is saying, "Let us negotiate with RCEP. Let's get that done, and then we'll discuss this with you." Is there any appetite? The third core priority in your departmental plan is pursuing a progressive trade agenda.

I'm just wondering what the department's opinion is. Rather than waiting for ASEAN, would it be more opportune to look at RCEP or some version of that? I've even heard it said that when you look at the Asia-Pacific countries and you look at the Indo-Pacific area specifically, maybe there should be a free trade area of the Asia-Pacific, and that could be expanded to include as many countries as possible. Rather than trying to do bilateral new deals, we could do something multilaterally and kill all birds with one stone.

• (1945)

Ms. Sarah Taylor: Mr. Chair, I would agree with the statement that this is a region that has huge opportunities for Canada and for many of our major trade partners that are growing in importance for us.

We actually already have one deal almost in hand. It's before the House now to ratify, which is of course, CPTPP, the trans-Pacific partnership. That will bind us into a free trade agreement with a number of major economies in the region. Notably, Japan, our fourth-largest trading partner, but also a number of ASEAN countries are members of CPTPP. That is for us a first and important step.

I think there's been some suggestion of RCEP being somehow a rival of CPTPP. There are different sets of players, but I think there's potential for them to be complementary. There is some overlap in membership. We're certainly following with interest the progress on

RCEP. It's probably a slightly less ambitious deal than is CPTPP but it is of interest. Certainly a shared goal for all in the region is ultimately a free trade area of Asia-Pacific. That is one of the goals that have been expressed collectively through our membership in APEC, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

Mr. Raj Saini: My final question is regarding your peace and stabilization programs, and I know that you funded that. Your 2016-17 departmental results list a number of cases where money was set aside for the clearance of explosive devices, including in places such as Iraq and Ukraine. This past December, the government announced an additional \$12 million to be put towards the clearance of land mines.

Can you please provide some detail as to where the money is being spent and what projects are being funded with these additional funds?

Mr. Mark Gwozdecky: The peace and stabilization program is a vital program that very few countries have. Not even every G7 country has a program like this. It's a program that focuses on the part of the spectrum that most conflict and fragile countries are most vulnerable to; that is, before they are stable enough to benefit from development assistance, they're going through a period of great fragility, and they need basic assistance to help them effectively get up and running. The stabilization involves helping newly liberated territories, for example, in Iraq, get their basic services up and running, whether that's water or electricity. It helps demine those areas so that people can live safely. It includes removing explosive ordnance and booby traps, and whatnot.

We have a number of those programs up and running in Iraq. We are supporting some demining in the liberated zones of Syria and elsewhere around the world. This program focuses on a broad range of stabilization activities. It complements our development assistance dollars and our humanitarian assistance dollars, and it means that Canada is a full-service provider, if you will, in terms of the states that most need our assistance.

The Chair: Colleagues, you're going to hear the bells start shortly. It's a 30-minute bell, so we have time.

[Translation]

Ms. Laverdière, the floor is yours.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to my former colleagues.

Here is my first question.

Would it be possible for the department to send us a statement of the expenditures allocated for election observations since the 2012-2013 financial year, including the budget forecasts for the current financial year?

[English]

Mr. Arun Thangaraj: I don't have that information with me right now, but we'd be happy to provide it to the committee.

The Chair: We'll get that provided to the committee. Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much.

Here is my second question.

Can you confirm that the Canada-Israel free trade agreement, or CIFTA, a new agreement on trade that has recently been modernized, improved and signed again, conforms to United Nations Security Council resolution 2334, specifically with the section requiring a distinction to be made between the territory of Israel and the occupied territories? As we know, Canada is bound by United Nations Security Council resolutions.

• (1950)

[English]

The Chair: Please introduce yourself for the record, and then go ahead and answer the question.

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk (Director General, North Africa, Israel, West Bank/Gaza, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much.

I am Mr. Troy Lulashnyk, director general of Israel, Palestinian territories, northern Africa.

[Translation]

Thank you for the question.

[English]

We just signed a modernized free trade agreement between Canada and Israel, and this was the subject of many events as it was launched in Canada this week.

With respect to the issues of the definitions and the scope, the modernization did not change in any way the coverage of the free trade agreement. Particularly in respect of the question related to definitions, it didn't touch it all.

The modernization was really designed to look at the new chapters and the new ways in which we can facilitate trade. The important features of that agreement and the extension include the dispute resolution mechanism and the gender component. The Minister of International Trade said this week that this modernization is the first one in the world, and a guide for all future ones.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: May I see from your response that the current free trade agreement does not conform to UN Security Council resolution 2334.

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: The free trade agreement that has been in place since the 1990s continues to be in place and the modernization didn't affect our definitions or the territories within which the trade is executed.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I didn't get a clear response, but I think we can presume the clear answer in that case. Thank you.

[Translation]

I would like to ask another question.

The Main Estimates 2018-2019 show that Global Affairs Canada has set aside about \$48 million in operating expenses in order to provide assistance to Canadians abroad. However, according to the 2016-2017 departmental report, the department forecasts that the

total cost of the consular program will rise to \$134 million in 2018-2019.

Can you explain the difference between those two amounts?

[English]

Ms. Heather Jeffrey: The figures that appear in the main estimates are the direct expenditures that go to providing assistance to Canadians abroad, consular services and emergency management, whereas the DPR also reflects the indirect expenditures, for example, our platform of missions abroad and the services that are provided throughout the international platform, indirect costs that also support that service.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Levitt, please.

We have twenty-seven and a half minutes to go before the vote.

Mr. Michael Levitt: I'm going to be splitting my time with MP Vandenbeld.

I have a couple of questions, both of them related to our recent travel to Asia which my colleague mentioned.

We just returned from Japan, Korea, and the Philippines a couple of weeks ago. Our focus was on many different issues in building the relationship with these countries, the bilateral relationship, and also a lot of discussion around ASEAN.

One of the areas where there was a great deal of appreciation for Canada and Canada's role was particularly around the Vancouver summit dealing with Korea. We heard great appreciation in Korea, and in Japan too, for Canada's leadership in bringing together so many countries to look at the prospects and help chart a path ahead.

I'm wondering if you collectively can provide any feedback on Canada's role, how that summit went, and what Canada's niche can be now, as this process moves forward.

• (1955)

Mr. Mark Gwozdecky: I would like to remind colleagues of the situation around North Korea not more than about 10 months ago when missile tests were being conducted, where the level of rhetoric was very extreme, and there was a deep sense of worry that tensions might boil over.

At that time Minister Freeland and then U.S. Secretary of State Tillerson agreed there was an important moment where countries needed to come together and put the emphasis back where it needs to be, which is on a diplomatic solution.

When 20 countries met at the ministerial level in Vancouver in January, we were very pleased and encouraged that there was a consensus that a diplomatic solution was not only possible, but was essential. Without suggesting any grandiose achievements from that single meeting, I think it was a moment in time when there was a clear determination to change the focus toward diplomacy. Fortunately, I think we would all agree that we're in a better place now with the potential for a summit between President Trump and Kim Jong-un in not too many days from now.

It was an example of Canada working with our most important partner and many other countries to try to change the channel, focus on a diplomatic solution that would stabilize the region, and benefit all.

Mr. Michael Levitt: Thank you.

I think it was clear to all members on that trip, and we went right up into the DMZ. Certainly in our discussions with senior Korean officials, there was, again, a great amount of appreciation for Canada's role in bringing together that group at the summit and the leadership we showed.

At this point, I'm going to pass the floor to Ms. Vandenheld.

Ms. Anita Vandenheld: Thank you so much.

I'm going to go back to the theme of my question I asked the minister, which was about elections in Venezuela. I'm very pleased that we downgraded our diplomatic relationship after what was very clearly a fraudulent election.

What are the criteria that we use when we look at elections and whether a downgrading of diplomatic relationships or a response is warranted? We know there are a number of elections around the world where.... An example is the DRC in 2011 and now there is a president who has overstayed his constitutional mandate. Another is Honduras in November 2017, where the OAS itself said that they couldn't guarantee elections were transparent. I could go on with a whole list of different elections that are questionable or not recognized by certain countries.

What do we actually look at? Is there a set of criteria? What is the determination as to whether a downgrading of our diplomatic relationship is warranted?

Mr. Martin Benjamin: That is an excellent question and a difficult one.

In the case of Venezuela, we recently had, as we discussed, and the minister was clear on that, the OAS special panel, which reported basically that.... The findings are that there is systematic attacks on the civilian population in Venezuela. This is like crimes against humanity. The report of the OAS will be submitted actually to the prosecutor at the International Criminal Court which has launched an investigation. Those matters are utterly serious. This is the highest threshold you could have in terms of needing to do something and taking action. That's why we had sanctions and we took measures, such as what you mentioned, downgrading our diplomatic relations with Venezuela.

The other cases that you mentioned, in Honduras, for example, the Government of Canada, with the advice we provided, it was a difficult situation. Nobody will claim that those elections were perfect. There were irregularities that were reported on, but at the end of the day, even the electoral monitoring observation mission that Canada funded reported that there were irregularities, but there was not systemic fraud.

Therefore, it was a difficult decision, but we decided, like our partners, our European allies and the United States, to recognize the Government of Honduras because, even though the elections were not perfect, they were still legitimate. That decision was not taken lightly. The minister has been very vocal at explaining that Canada actually expects more and better from the Government of Honduras in terms of human rights defenders and for them and others to have the space to do what they need to do and to protect human rights. We actually expect the Government of Honduras to reform its electoral system. Some of those recommendations were actually made way back in 2009, and the government didn't act on them, and in the last election again...were difficult.

There are difficult circumstances. For each and every one of them, we need to make a clear assessment as to what is the best way forward, should we recognize the government or not.

In the case of Venezuela, it is clear. There is no ambiguity. We're talking about a systematic attack on the civilian population.

• (2000)

The Chair: Colleagues, that will wrap up our work with the Global Affairs officials.

We have about 20 minutes before the votes.

Officials, thank you very much for taking this time.

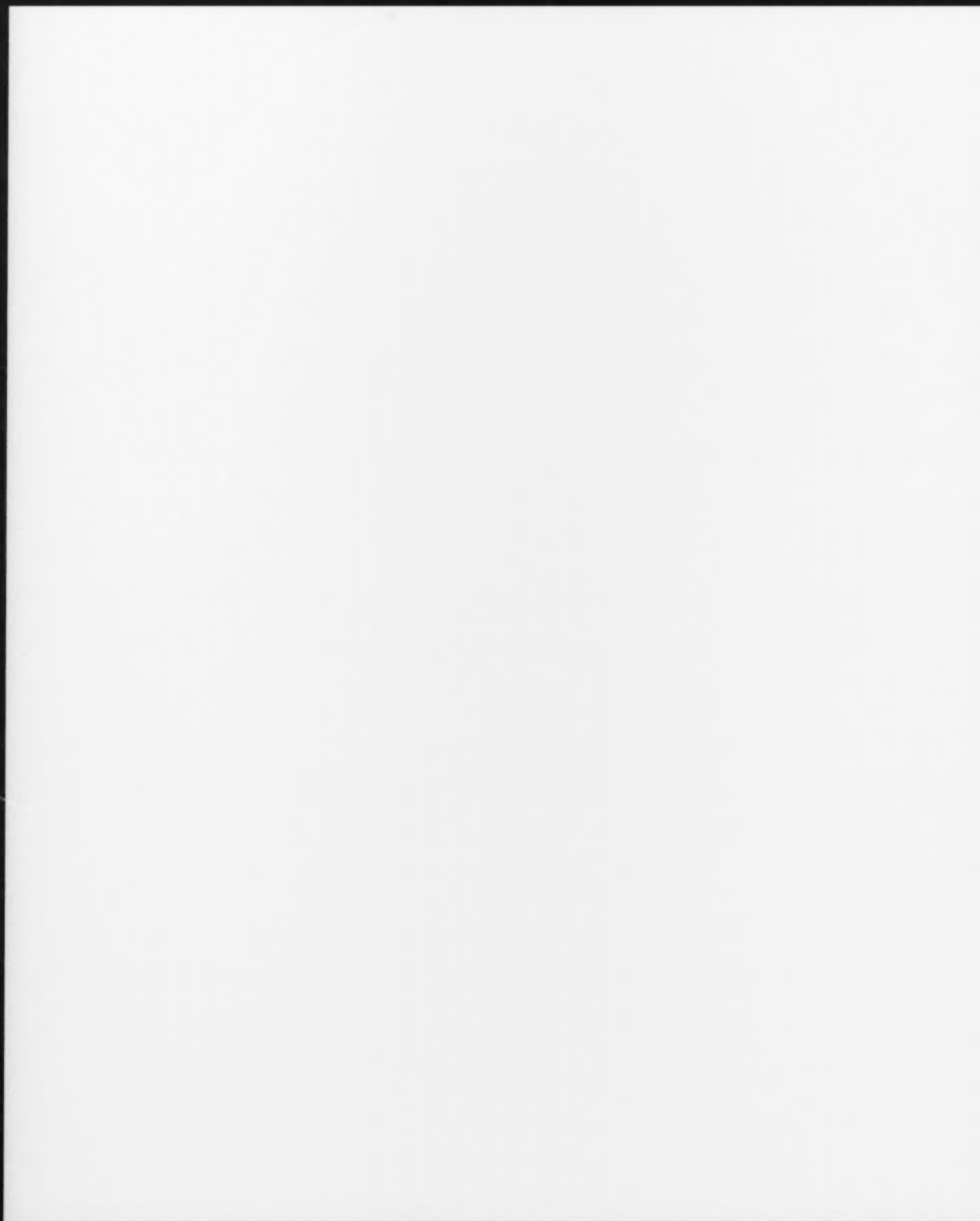
I want to thank everyone for their patience for having this special meeting and accommodating some difficult schedules. I know it's late at night. Well done. It's much appreciated.

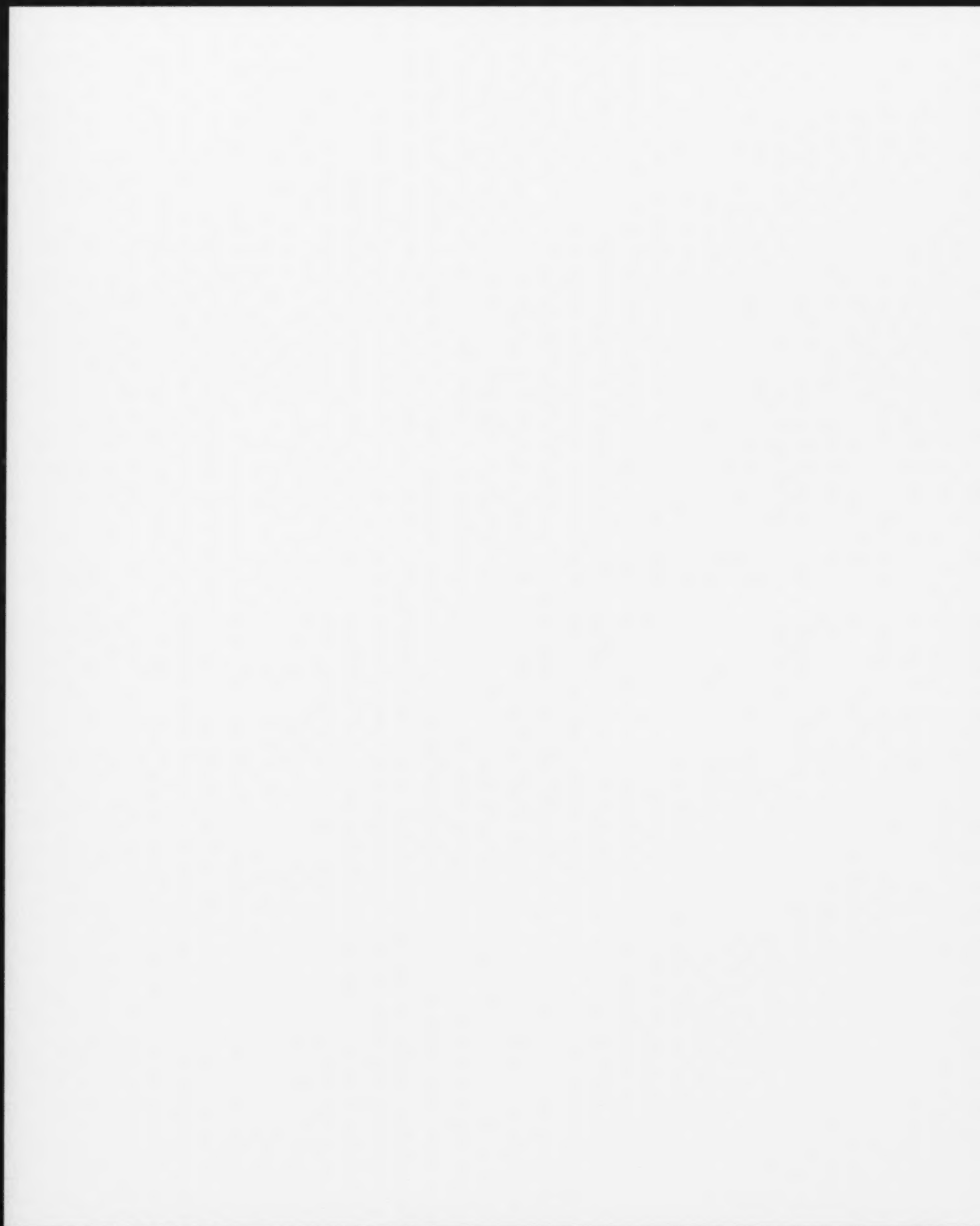
We'll see you tomorrow at 3:30 p.m., if there aren't too many votes.

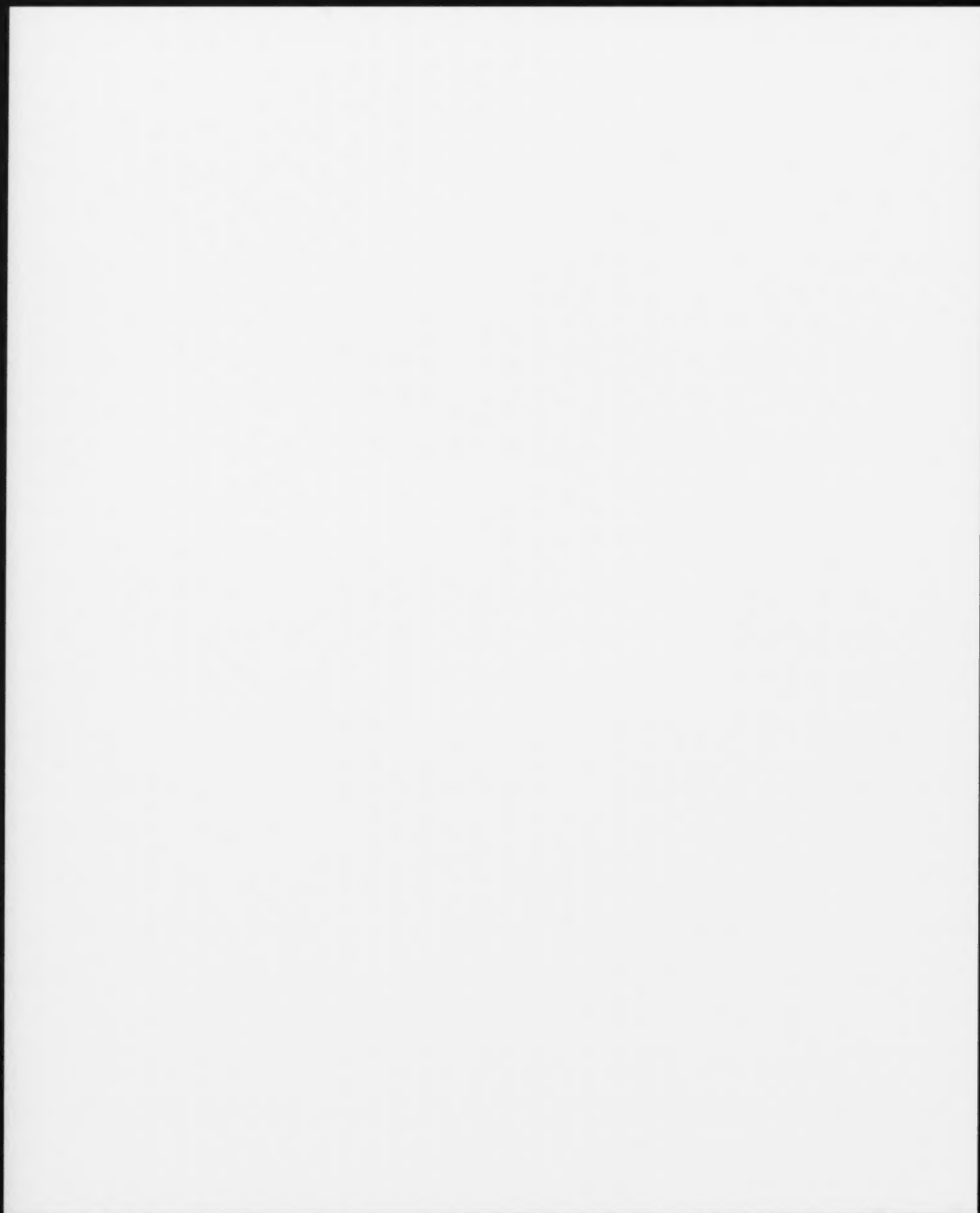
We'll see Minister Bibeau and officials for the next round of our discussion on this matter.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.







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